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CIA Drug Traffic

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Sec. 4.01.2 Politics of

Heroin in SE Asia

Heroin run

Trade in Turkey is bad but the narcotics dealers are doing well in Thailand. Just when the Americans are congratulating themselves that the opium traffic from Turkey is ending they discover that more heroin is coming into the United States from south-east Asia than they realised.

Stopping the flow of heroin at its source is a mammoth task. The Administration is already giving the Turkish government money to help the peasants who will not be allowed to grow another crop of opium after this year. In south-east Asia the problem is even more difficult. A high level report prepared by the Central Intelligence Agency claims that it will be virtually impossible to stem the flow of drugs from this area because of the lack

of co-operation from both the governments concerned and from Americans living in the area. A book called "The Politics of Heroin in South-east Asia," which is due to be published in September, comes to virtually the same conclusion. But the author, Mr McCoy, goes further and accuses the agency itself of collusion with those trafficking in drugs.

Generally the CIA prefers not to respond to criticism but this book, which some officials were allowed to see before publication, has triggered heated denials and allegations that the evidence used is out of date. But these protestations seem to ring rather hollow since the agency's own report appears to support much of the evidence used in the book against the governments in the region. It is obviously a sensitive subject. The CIA has its own reason for wanting to protect its agents who are involved in highly dangerous operations. But it also seems that the Administration wants to protect the reputation of the governments in south-east Asia. Its spokesmen are now saying that the evidence used in the CIA report which was completed last February is out of date and that the governments concerned are co-operating enthusiastically in the fight against narcotics.

The most effective part of the attack on heroin seems to be within the United States itself, judging from the figures. The federal narcotics authorities claim to have seized an average of 71 lb of heroin a month, or \$31m worth, on the east coast alone in the past 12 months. This is nearly nine times more than in the same period of the previous year. These successes have led to both an increase in the price of a gramme of heroin from \$418 to \$785 and to a lowering of the quality of the heroin on sale. This may not have helped those who are already addicted but it may have stopped others from getting hooked. The real effects of the programme are unlikely to be felt for a few years. At present no one is even sure how many heroin addicts there are in the United States. President Nixon has now asked Congress to add another \$135m to bring the total for the fight against narcotics next year to over £300m.